

**Town of Ancram
Comprehensive Plan Committee
Strategy Workshops
February 2, 7, 9 & 14, 2009**

The Ancram Comprehensive Planning Committee held four strategy workshops at the Town Hall to discuss with town residents, business operators, and property owners the Vision, Goals and Strategies which make up the Draft Comp Plan. Over 1100 Ancram families and businesses received an invitation in the mail in mid-January to attend these workshops. Approximately 50 people attended the workshops.

Comp Plan Committee Chair Art Bassin opened each meeting with a brief overview of the planning process the Committee has gone through over the past 18 months, stressing the Comp Plan was a “bottoms up” effort based on extensive public input via workshops, one-on-one and small group meetings, and a detailed community survey.

Mr. Bassin commented that what the Community says it wants is very simple: “To keep Ancram the way it is, but fix some of the obvious problems.” That’s the essence of the Plan. To achieve this will require that some changes be made, as outlined in the Detailed Strategies section of the Plan, to town zoning, policies and procedures.

Mr. Bassin also noted that the Committee operated with two “rules”: 1) that the Comp Plan Committee’s duty was to represent and reflect the Community’s points of view on the issues, not the committee members’ personal views, and 2) that Committee decisions should be based on consensus, not on 4-3 or 5-4 votes. These rules created a process which resulted in extensive discussion and debate among Committee members and between the Committee and the Community, but in the end, should produce a Comp Plan which accurately reflects the Community’s Vision for the future, and is supported by the Community.

Mr. Bassin indicated that the Plan recommends formal reviews every 5 years to make sure the Plan evolves with changing conditions and with changes in the Community’s perspectives.

Following Mr. Bassin’s remarks, Ms. Nan Stolzenburg, the Town’s Comp Plan planning advisor, presented an hour long review of what a Comp Plan

is, how the planning process was managed, what we learned, and what the recommended goals and strategies are. This presentation was circulated via email to everyone on the email list two weeks ago, and is on the Town web site in the Comp Plan documents section. Ms. Stolzenburg noted that the community workshops and the survey conducted in late 2007 had identified what people liked about Ancram and wanted to preserve, and what people did not like and wanted to see fixed. These community priorities were the basis for the Vision, Goals and Strategies which have been developed as part of the Comprehensive Plan. She also noted that the planning process involved describing “where we are” today, which has been captured in the Profile and Inventory Document, the maps, the Water Study and the Buildout Study; “where we want to be in 20 years”, which has been developed from Community input via the workshops and the survey; and “how we want to get there”, which has been described in the Goals and Strategies documents.

Following the presentations, the attendees asked questions to clarify issues, and offered comments on what they liked and did not like about the Plan. The Q&A was recorded on video by B. Doctor, and is available to anyone who wants to review that information.

The major areas of questions and comments included:

1. Concerns for the future of farming in Ancram, farmers’ opinions on the Comp Plan and how the Town could support profitable farming.
2. Support for the aspects of the Plan which supported agriculture, open space and the environment while accommodating residential and economic development.
3. Support for the average lot size concept, smaller more flexible lots, and the affordable housing aspects of the Plan.
4. Concerns about how soon the Plan would be adopted, how it would be implemented and how it would affect other Town laws, policies and practices.
5. Concerns about the level of Town Board support for the Plan, and the risks of not adopting the plan.

6. The desirability of coordinating our Comp Plan with neighboring communities and the County to develop a region-wide plan supporting our vision and goals.
7. The relationship between the rate of residential development, the growth of the tax base and support for local businesses.
8. Concerns about how hard it would be to get some of the Comp Plan recommendations, like fixing the 82/7 intersection, accomplished. The Town has no control over this intersection, and has been trying to get the State and County to do something here for at least 20 years.
9. Concerns that commercial and residential design standards do not complicate the residential or commercial development process to the point of discouraging desirable development.
10. Concerns that we not overly use “tax incentives,” to attract or retain businesses or to encourage desirable development practices, but rather try to come up with other kinds of incentives to meet the same goals.
11. Support for ½ acre lot sizes in the hamlets, but concerns that water and septic constraints may make ½ acre lots impractical.
12. Concern that all current and planned roads are adequately designed and maintained so emergency vehicles have access.

Following the Q&A and comments, Mr. Bassin indicated that the Committee would review the feedback from the Workshops, from public officials, and others in the Community and revise the draft Plan before submitting it “officially” to the Community at a public hearing, which will take place in mid-April. Following the April public hearing, the Committee will review and revise the draft Plan again, if needed, and will then submit the draft Plan to the Town Board, if all goes well, at the May Town Board meeting.